

Comments in Support of Montana SR 9  
63<sup>rd</sup> Legislative Session  
David R.M. Beck  
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SENATE EDUCATION  
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My name is David Beck. I am a professional historian and professor and department chair at the University of Montana, in the Native American Studies Department. However, I am speaking in support of Senate Resolution 9 on my own behalf, not the university's.

My expertise is the misguided federal policies toward Indian tribes in the 1950s, commonly known as the termination policy.<sup>1</sup> This was an effort by the United States government to end the federal government to government relationships with the tribes in the United States. Fortunately it was never applied to any Montana tribes, but more than 100 Indian tribes in the United States suffered from this policy, which was damaging to the tribes, to the states in which they were located and even – ironically – to the federal budget. By the late 1960s the policy was recognized as one of the most significant Indian policy failures in U.S. history. President Richard Nixon worked together successfully with Democrat and Republican senators and congressmen as well as Indian leaders to reverse this policy in the early 1970s. One of the most powerful legacies of the Nixon presidency, as my Republican friends remind me on a regular basis, is the development of self-determination as a federal policy for Indian country. This was the same era in which Montana drafted its modern constitution recognizing the importance of Montana's Indian communities within the state.

The Idle No More movement that has developed in Canada and spread across the hemisphere and even the globe is in response to a Canadian federal policy initiative that aims to terminate rights of the First Nations in Canada. As we well know, numerous tribes along the high line as well as the tribes west of the mountains are divided by the U.S.-Canadian border and many tribal people in Montana have relatives on both sides of the border. Their families and their families' communities will be devastated if the Canadian federal policy initiatives are enacted. Ironically these efforts mirror failed attempts to redefine tribal relations within the United States from the late nineteenth to mid twentieth centuries.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognizes that indigenous peoples have the rights to control their own destinies. Here in the United States we recognize what are referred to as inherent rights of tribal peoples both legally and ethically. To our credit the Montana constitution and legislative acts support these rights and education surrounding them. By supporting this resolution, we will be urging our nation as a whole to catch up to Montana.

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<sup>1</sup> My works on this subject include academic articles as well as these two books: *Seeking Recognition: The Termination and Restoration of the Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians of Oregon, 1855-1984* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009); *The Struggle for Self Determination: History of the Menominee Indians Since 1854* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

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